

Vetnc, L
File 5
C.1

This copy is being furnished for private research use only. It may not be further reproduced, resold, or used for publication. The requester assumes full responsibility for copyright questions that may arise concerning this reproduction or the use of the material.

My Turn

Service With a Smile, And Plenty of Metal

I can't help shuddering and averting my eyes when I find myself staring at a face full of hoops and studs

BY DEBRA DARVICK

WHEN I CAN READ THE latte menu through the hole in my server's earlobe, something is seriously out of whack. The first time

I saw this I nearly blew my lunch into the tip jar. Is this how the Gen-whatevers define beauty? What happened to an earring, maybe two, in each lobe? Gone to air guns, every one. Now any surface is game. Brow, lip, tongue, cheek, nose. As this is a family magazine, I won't even go south of the neck. I've adjusted to untied shoelaces and pants that make rooming irrelevant. But when it comes to piercings, I just can't budge.

Go ahead and say it. I'm over the hill. My "Let's Go: Europe" days have even way to "Letting Go: A Parent's Guide to Understanding the College Years." The esthetic gap between my generation and the one coming upawns wider than the space between David Letterman's two front teeth.

There is an employee at my local bookstore. The first time he waited on me I went weak in the knees, and not because he looks like Johnny Depp. He had a ring. In his nose. Toro style. It was big enough to hold one of my dinner napkins. His upper lip was pierced by its twin. OK, OK, I exaggerate. The lip ring could have encircled only a tea napkin.

Does anybody else suffer *frissons* of revulsion, or is it just me? I cannot let him wait on me. I like chatting with wait staff and servers as much as the next patron. But if I can't look someone in the face because of his piercings, please take my place in line. I'll await the next cashier.

My kids think my attitude is horrible and prejudiced. It's not. These young people are helpful, enthusiastic, efficient. They offer service with a smile. The smile, however, is often studded, pierced and hooped.

The last time I bought a CD, the cashier chatted me up. A bar thing was threaded through her tongue. Another pierced her eyebrow. Her ear tinkled metal each time she moved. Where was I supposed to focus when I was speaking with her?



RITE OF PASSAGE? Some piercings must hurt like hell, and the anesthetic wears off. Perhaps there is pride in that pain.

Every generation has its style, its outrageous fads. We certainly had ours in the '70s—no bra, hair down to there and bell-bottoms so wide they could have tolled from here to Haight-Ashbury. My daughter is appalled that I would ever leave the house sans Maidenform. Perhaps the piercers are merely going through a stage that will not only pass but close up, preferably without too much scarring.

As I was surfing the Internet I came across an interview with Ariel Glucklich, a theologian at Georgetown University who, as author of the book "Sacred Pain: Hurting the Body for the Sake of the Soul," shares an

interesting take on the issue. Glucklich believes our understanding of pain has all but lost its link to holiness. "The modern person is a patient or a citizen," he says, "someone with individual rights, including the right to avoid pain. No one wants to go back to surgeries or even dentists without anesthetics. But the result is that we forgot that life's many pains used to have distinct and vivid meanings. Those meanings—that pain can be healing, or initiating, or instructive—have been lost despite the fact that many of our pains are still right there... The trick is to learn how to change that profane pain into something meaningful, a form of self-sacrifice."

He's got a point there. Childbirth hurt like nothing I'd ever known. Yet there was something holy about that agony. Labor's pain reduced me to my animal essence. Gone were ego and intellect; ditto pretense and vanity. It was just me and those bone-shattering contractions. Talk about self-sacrifice. Bringing my children into the world demanded that I give up any sense of propriety. Once it was over, I was in awe at what I had endured. And holding my babies definitely conferred healing and initiation.

Maybe on some level it's the same with piercings. At a time when bulwark institutions—schools, churches and synagogues, parents—have lost much of the authority adolescents need to simultaneously rail against and draw comfort from, perhaps piercings provide a path to create meaning out of the profane. Much the same way colors are used by gang members to stake out turf and identity, piercings have become a mode of group identification and the self-validation that comes with it.

Some of these piercings have to hurt like hell, and the anesthetic eventually wears off. Perhaps there is pride in that pain. Then again, maybe it's about nothing more than a Gen-XYZ trend. I certainly didn't eschew the Maidenform to bond with feminist ideologues.

I don't know that I'll ever let Mr. Toro ring up my books, but the next time I see a stud glinting in my server's tongue as she recites the specials of the day, I'll likely stifle a shudder or two. And I'll wonder: what is the reason behind this intersection of flesh and metal? Am I attempting to find meaning in a fad that is only skin deep?

DARVICK is a writer living in Birmingham, Mich.

This material may be protected by copyright law (Title 17 U.S. Code)

This copy is being furnished for private research use only. It may not be further reproduced, resold, or used for publication. The requester assumes full responsibility for copyright questions that may arise concerning this reproduction or the use of the material.

Sick, and Tired of the Endless Paperwork

We've been charged for seeing doctors we never met, and even the armrests on my wife's wheelchair

BY DOUG GARR

WHEN MY WIFE, MEG, SUFFERED a severe stroke that immobilized her left side, I knew we would be facing a grueling odyssey involving several hospitals, dozens of doctors and countless therapy sessions. What I wasn't prepared for was the American Way of Managed Health Care, a system that is bureaucratic and often dysfunctional. Yes, medical practitioners in the United States are generally considered among the best in the world, and my wife primarily had first-rate care, but their back-office practice—a business dominated by third-party payers—is badly run at worst and woefully confusing at best.

Meg's stroke occurred while we were vacationing in the south of France last summer. After being stabilized in the emergency room of a small hospital, she was transferred immediately to a large teaching hospital, where she received excellent treatment in a world-renowned stroke pavilion. When I received the bill for her 2½-week stay at the Pasteur Hospital in Nice, I asked the deputy administrator for an itemized statement. I knew I'd need to show it to our health-insurance company—the one-page invoice for more than €20,000 wouldn't do. The administrator was puzzled. There were only two daily rates, he explained, one for *soins intensifs*—or intensive care—and another for non-acute care. There were no extra charges; the numerous ambulance transfers, MRI brain scans, X-rays and assorted tests associated with any serious injury or illness were all-inclusive. In fact, the only supplement was €10.67—about \$13—a day for food which, although not three-star bistro quality, was certainly a bargain, and better than anything you can eat in a U.S. hospital.

I'm not arguing that the French health-care system should be a world benchmark, but compared with what we faced when we returned home, it was a model of simplicity and efficiency. Of course, everything in American medical care is à la carte, and the invoices are so dense with codes and abbreviations, it's a wonder anyone can decipher them. I often wonder, how much does this cost the American public annually?



LIFE ON HOLD: Administrators barely raised an eyebrow when I told them I'd no longer bother calling to dispute the charges

At one New York hospital, we received bills from doctors we'd never heard of, including one who charged for an office visit when Meg couldn't even get out of bed. The managed care provider's computer sent him a check without question. Had he not billed us for the co-payment I never would have noticed the error. Over the past few months, I spent hours clearing up these kinds of mistakes. A doctor friend who heads a department in a large hospital admitted that these kinds of complaints are all too common.

Meg's medical tab has reached nearly \$300,000, which seems monumental, even given the nature of her catastrophic injury.

Thankfully, we were covered for most of it. Yet \$90,000 of that figure had little or nothing to do with patient care. Roughly 30 cents of each health-care dollar goes to administration, or the processing of paperwork. If that figure could be reduced by a third, even \$30,000 would go a long way toward extending her rehab treatments. (Meg's 2004 benefits have run out.)

When Meg was finally discharged after spending 56 days in hospitals, we received co-payment bills for her medical equipment, including an itemized statement for every extra on her wheelchair (no, the brake extensions, foot pedals, armrest, anti-tip bars, seat and seat belt are not included). But the provider billed us two ways, one for leasing the chair and another for purchase. Even now, after numerous phone calls, I still don't know whether we own or are renting the wheelchair.

The outpatient rehab therapy sessions presented their own set of challenges. The hospital sent a number of bills—printed in alphanumeric codes—for additional thousands of dollars even though we made the proper co-payments at the time of treatment. Billing administrators barely raised an eyebrow when I told them I had spent too much time on hold and would no longer bother calling to dispute the charges. (We have since received automated early-morning phone calls asking us to contact the hospital.)

I've checked with others who have had protracted negotiations with health-care providers and insurers over complex medical treatment. They echo my frustration. Why is it incumbent on the recipient to spend countless hours rectifying the medical administration's mistakes? How much extra does

this process add to the nation's annual health-care bill?

Medicare—our government-subsidized system that cares for the elderly—has a much better record in administrative costs. It spends between three and four cents of every dollar on paperwork and processing. A single-payer system is easier and cheaper to run. We've had a two-tier health-care system in the United States for a while, and only one tier works. Isn't it time for managed care to slim down and help its patients get better instead of burdening them with needlessly expensive paperwork?

GARR is a writer living in New York City.

My Turn

'Save the Elephants: Don't Buy Ivory Soap'

Burdening kids with issues they can't understand creates confusion, not future environmentalists

BY KATIE JOHNSON SLIVOVSKY

LIVE IN THE CHICAGO SUBURBS, where the nearest wild area is the ice-cream place after a T-ball game. Still, exposing my kids to nature is high on my to-do list. We check under rocks for bugs, maintain a bird feeder, take lunch to the nearest forest preserve and go camping twice a year. I've been fortunate enough to be able to turn my love of nature into a career: I'm an educator at a zoo.

I recently read an article at work that sparked a change in the way I think about kids and nature. In "Beyond Ecophobia: Reclaiming the Heart in Nature Education," educator David Sobel tells the story of an 8-year-old who learned about elephant poaching in school. At home, the girl created a poster for display in her local grocery store with the slogan "Save the Elephants: Don't Buy Ivory Soap." She wanted to help but clearly she didn't understand the issues surrounding poaching.

I began to look around at the kinds of environmental messages reaching kids today. I found statistics about endangered animals and rain-forest destruction on kids' TV shows, in books and magazines, even on the backs of their animal-cracker and cereal boxes.

These include some seriously sad messages. One "Save the Earth" book lists this "amazing fact" for grade-school children: "Every day, 40,000 of the world's poorest children under age 5 die unnecessarily for lack of basic health care and medicine." An alphabet book about extinct animals tells preschoolers, "L is for Las Vegas frog ... People built the city of Las Vegas and paved over all the freshwater springs where this frog used to live. Sadly, we say goodbye to the Las Vegas frog." The very last sentence of the book is, "Let's hope

human beings never become extinct."

Night-night, Jimmy.

A friend showed me a painting of a whale her 3-year-old made at preschool. The teacher had written "endangered" on the page. How do you explain "endan-



SMALL STEPS: My kids don't know the meaning of 'endangered,' but they can tell you what it feels like to lie under the stars

gered" to a preschooler? "Well, honey, when you grow up, there may not be any whales left." Pretty heavy stuff.

One problem is that these concepts are just too abstract and complex for kids who still believe in the Tooth Fairy. They aren't developmentally ready to understand the issues or reasonable solutions. One second grader wrote to our zoo director, "... please don't let people build their houses in front of an animal's habitat. Because you could be building a hunter's house and they could kill the animals living there."

Cognitive disconnect isn't the only problem. Worse, perhaps, is the emotional toll environmental doom and gloom can have on

kids. There have always been global problems—but only recently have kids been made to feel responsible for solving them. When I think back to my own childhood, I wonder how my friends and I would have reacted to cereal-box messages like FIND A CURE FOR POLIO or STOP THE VIETNAM WAR. I recently heard a psychologist on television say that the No. 1 stressor in life is feeling responsible for things we can't control.

I was interested in what *does* motivate people to care about the environment, and came across an article by psychologist Louise Chawla. She interviewed environmentally active citizens and found that they attributed their commitment to "many hours spent outdoors [as children] ... and an adult who taught a respect for nature." This was the recipe of my own childhood—lazy summers spent exploring the creek with my dog, and a dad who understood how exciting it was to find a crawdad under an overturned rock.

So when should we start talking to kids about environmental problems? Sobel advises "no tragedies before fourth grade." By 10 or so, kids can help solve small problems—like how to get teammates to recycle their water bottles. By middle school, kids are ready to take on more complex issues like how to influence environmental policy.

Here's my confession: I haven't always seen the need to back off the bad news. I used finger puppets to teach kindergartners about rain-forest destruction, and I wasn't particularly concerned about how they slept at night. Why didn't I realize that what brought me to my career was the fun I had playing in the woods as a kid, not hear-

ing alarming news about the environment?

My kids, ages 9 and 5, don't know the meaning of the word "endangered." But they can tell you what it feels like to hold a worm or lie in the grass under the stars. They also turn off the water when they brush their teeth and take leftovers to the compost pile. These are kid-appropriate conservation actions, done not out of fear but out of habit. It's my kids' love of nature and earth-friendly practices—not their understanding of global demands on resources—that reassures me they will grow to be good caretakers of the natural world.

SLIVOVSKY lives in Western Springs, Ill.

Forget the Fads—The Old Way Works Best

What will fix public education? A teacher, a chalkboard and a roomful of willing students.

BY EVAN KELIHER

I'VE NEVER CLAIMED TO HAVE PSYCHIC powers, but I did predict that the \$500 million that philanthropist Walter Annenberg poured into various school systems around the country, beginning in 1993, would fail to make any difference in the quality of public education. Regrettably, I was right.

By April 1998, it was clear that the much-ballyhooped effort had collapsed on itself. A Los Angeles Times editorial said, "All hopes have diminished. The promised improvements have not been realized." The program had become so bogged down by politics and bureaucracy that it had failed to create any significant change.

How did I know this would be the result of Annenberg's well-intentioned efforts? Easy. There has never been an innovation or reform that has helped children learn any better, faster or easier than they did prior to the 20th century. I believe a case could be made that real learning was better served then than now.

Let me quote TheodoreSizer, the former dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Education and the director of the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, which received some of the grant money. A few years ago a reporter asked him if he could name a single reform in the last 15 years that had been successful. Sizer replied, "I don't think there is one."

I taught in the Detroit public-school system for 30 years. While I was there, I participated in team-teaching, supervised peer-tutoring programs and tussled with block scheduling plans. None of it ever made a discernible difference in my stu-

dents' performance. The biggest failure of all was the decentralization scheme introduced by a new superintendent in the early 1970s. His idea was to break our school system into eight smaller districts—each with its own board of education—so that



REFORMING REFORM: Every minute teachers spend on misguided strategies is time they could spend on academics

parents would get more involved and educators would be more responsive to our students' needs. Though both of those things happened, by the time I retired in 1986 the number of students who graduated each year still hadn't risen to more than half the class. Two thirds of those who did graduate failed the exit exam and received a lesser diploma. We had changed everything but the level of student performance.

What baffles me is not that educators implement new policies intended to help kids perform better, it's that they don't learn from others' mistakes. A few years ago I read about administrators at a mid-

dle school in San Diego, where I now live, who wanted a fresh teaching plan for their new charter school and chose the team-teaching model. Meanwhile, a few miles away, another middle school was in the process of abandoning that same model because it hadn't had any effect on students' grades.

The plain truth is we need to return to the method that's most effective: a teacher in front of a chalkboard and a roomful of willing students. The old way is the best way. We have it from no less a figure than Euclid himself. When Ptolemy I, the king of Egypt, said he wanted to learn geometry, Euclid explained that he would have to study long hours and memorize the contents of a fat math book. The pharaoh complained that that would be unseemly and demanded a shortcut. Euclid replied, "There is no royal road to geometry."

There wasn't a shortcut to the learning process then and there still isn't. Reform movements like new math and whole language have left millions of damaged kids in their wake. We've wasted billions of taxpayer dollars and forced our teachers to spend countless hours in workshops learning to implement the latest fads. Every minute teachers have spent on misguided educational strategies (like building kids' self-esteem by acting as "facilitators" who oversee group projects) is time they could have been teaching academics.

The only way to truly foster confidence in our students is to give them real skills—in reading, writing and arithmetic—that they can be proud of. One model that incorporates this idea is direct instruction, a program that promotes rigorous, highly scripted interaction between teacher and students.

The physicist Stephen Hawking says we can be sure time travel is impossible because we never see any visitors from the future. We can apply that same logic to the subject of school reforms: we know they have not succeeded because we haven't seen positive results. But knowing that isn't enough. We should stop using students as lab rats and return to a more traditional method of teaching. If it was good enough for Euclid, it is good enough for us.

KELIKER is the author of "Guerrilla Warfare for Teachers: A Survival Guide."



Check out My Turn at 30, highlights from three decades of the column, on Newsweek.MSNBC.com

The Last Word Anna Quindlen

A Foul Mouth And Manhood

IN 1962, WHEN THE NEW YORK TIMES QUOTED President John F. Kennedy during a dispute with the steel industry as saying, "My father always told me that all businessmen were sons of bitches, but I never believed it till now," the White House went ballistic. The press office complained, the publisher of the Times apologized and the AP noted that other newspapers

had found the quote unfit to print.

That was then. This is @*!%.

Or the F word. Or expletive deleted. Or what have you: the powers of expurgated invention fail me. What does it mean that today it means nothing when the vice president unrepentantly uses a word in public that this magazine won't use in print? It means that standards have changed since 1962. Not just standards of obscenity—standards of masculinity.

Dick Cheney's decision to advise Sen. Patrick Leahy to perform an anatomically impossible sex act (thereby creating a journalistically impossible quotation situation) has been discussed in terms of the rise of the potty mouth. After all, the F word is still considered so beyond the pale that when Bono used it at the Golden Globes, the chair of the FCC called it "abhorrent," and when John Kerry paired it with "up" to describe Iraq policy in a interview, the president's chief of staff described himself as "disappointed."

The Cheney flap triggers the hypocrisy meter, since neither of those (Republican) officials has described the vice president's language as abhorrent or disappointing. And it raises the trickle-down question, too. If the vice president of the country feels comfortable—nay, exultant—about using the word on the Senate floor, can the vice president of the student council be far behind? I can't wait for the principal's reaction the first time a smart teenager offers the Cheney defense verbatim:

"He had challenged my integrity. And I didn't like that. But most of all I didn't like the fact that after he had done so, then he wanted to act like everything's peaches and cream. And I informed him of my view of his conduct in no uncertain terms. And, as I say, I felt better afterwards."

But the most enduring lesson of this

event has more to do with what passes for a guy than what passes for a role model. Slinging obscenities has always been the verbal equivalent of towel snapping; cursing the senator, who has harped on Cheney's connection to defense contractor Halliburton and its connection to lucrative contracts in Iraq, was the closest the vice president could come to throwing a punch. It wasn't the first time the administration gloried in being faux hard core; it was to Cheney that George W. Bush made the comment that a New York Times reporter was, to stick with euphemisms, a

In recent years the Republican hard guys have surely taken over the Y-chromosome territory from the feel-your-pain Democrats

major-league sphincter, and it was the vice president who responded jovially, "Big time."

To appreciate just how much of this is macho, consider what the response would have been had Sen. Hillary Clinton used the same word the vice president (or Senator Kerry) did. Or look at an exchange on CNN about the Cheney remark. Tucker Carlson accuses Paul Begala of being "angry, like a little girl." Begala says Cheney is "a baby—he needs a diaper." Whoa. Testosterone alert, big time.

One interesting aspect of this presidential race is that by traditional standards, Kerry has the masculinity factor sewn up; an inveterate jock and a war hero

trumps a former cheerleader and a stay-at-home guardsman. But in recent years the Republican hard guys have taken over the Y-chromosome territory from the feel-your-pain Democrats, and Bush's persona—the reformed party animal, the laconic rancher, the anti-intellectual C student—dovetails perfectly with the Zeitgeist of the new GOP. When he said that he wanted Osama bin Laden dead or alive, it was a John Wayne moment.

The vice president is not a cowboy-boots kind of character, and a public spat between two bald guys in glasses is more faculty lounge than O.K. Corral. It takes one of them unleashing the F word to give a street spin to the hissy fit, to show that he won't take any you-know-what from the sphincters who make his life hell. (Thank God—finally a profanity I can use.) This is supposed to tell the world that he's a real man.

Macho posturing has always been part of politics; it's one reason women have found it hard to break into the business. But what constitutes male is in the eye, or the ear, of the beholder. Kennedy obviously thought being seen as crude would lessen his stature. But in the current climate, being seen as too polite or too sensitive is considered weak. Frat-boy locutions are the equivalent of biceps tattoos for the suit-and-tie crowd.

This is not particularly useful in elevating the tone in Washington, or in trying to show kids that the reflexive use of certain words is the last refuge of those who are neither intelligent nor thoughtful enough to plumb a more varied vocabulary. It brings out the worst in everyone; I'm personally tempted to advise the vice president to—aw, never mind. That's a guy thing. Besides, the bosses here set a higher official standard than the ones at the White House do.



PHOTOGRAPH BY CHARLES OLSZAK FOR NEWSWEEK

To Hell With Well Behaved

RECENTLY A YOUNG MOTHER ASKED FOR advice. What, she wanted to know, was she to do with a 7-year-old who was obstreperous, outspoken and inconveniently willful?

"Keep her," I replied.

Not helpful, but heartfelt. I have never been a fan of tractable women, having mostly experienced self-loathing

when I tried to masquerade as one. Yet despite progress and change, liberation and self-examination, she has a way of resurrecting herself, the girl who sits with her hands folded, the woman who keeps her mouth shut.

WELL-BEHAVED WOMEN DON'T MAKE HISTORY, says the T shirt a college student sent me. It's been worn and washed so often, it's the texture of tissue.

Here she comes again, the fantasy and the reality. Hollywood has showcased her in a remake of "The Stepford Wives," in which judges, doctors and executives are remade by their husbands into Stay-at-Home Barbies, and apparently the most shocking thing a woman can admit is that she's more accomplished than her spouse. As punishment for this heresy, she must be transformed into a vacuous trophy wife. This is either satire or wish fulfillment, depending on how you see studio execs. Of course, there is the sub rosa suggestion abroad in the world that it is actually more soothing to shop and lunch than perform surgery. But only if you're a girl. When it is suggested that men might be happier playing golf full time than closing a deal, it is called downsizing and is a bad thing.

And in real life we have the Stepford voters, who are supposed to go along to get along, taking what they're given. At cause luncheons throughout the country, women who are interested and involved in politics talk quietly about how no one seems to be chasing their support. Then they sigh and move on. Which may be what John Kerry will be doing if he keeps this up.

The gender gap has been the most persistent voter phenomenon in presidential elections in the past 25 years. Men disproportionately support the Republicans and women the Democrats. Depending on whom you talk to, this is either because

men are more interested in fiscal issues and women in social concerns or because men couldn't care less about sex discrimination, sexual harassment and unwanted pregnancies and women have to live with all three. Although not so the ruling Republicans would notice.

Many progressive Republican women—not an oxymoron—have become disenchanted with George W. Bush, who began his term by blocking aid to foreign family-planning groups and went on to allow his attorney general to try to rifle through the private medical files of women who had

Women who are interested and involved in politics talk quietly about how no one is chasing their vote. Then they sigh and move on.

had abortions. A golden opportunity for the Democratic challenger thus presents itself. Poll figures suggest women are more inclined to see things his way to begin with. And if the pattern of the last election continues, female voters will participate at a higher rate than their male counterparts.

Which makes you wonder why the Kerry campaign seems to be taking women for granted. Where are the commercials that discuss the trifecta of child care, health care and jobs that constitutes real homeland security for women juggling work and family? What was the deal with that lame answer about appointing judges hostile to abortion rights as long as the vote on *Roe* wasn't too close? Where is the emphasis in

events and in message? Just for a moment, pretend we're autoworkers!

More than 20 million unmarried American women, a group polls have found are more liberal than the average person, never even voted in the 2000 presidential election. They didn't think it was worth the effort. If he reached out to those women as aerobically as George W. Bush has to evangelicals, Kerry could be working on his Inaugural speech right now. Instead the Democrats seem to be figuring that most female voters have nowhere else to go.

They're counting on the gratitude factor. Democrats better than Republicans, 14 female senators better than none, America better than Afghanistan. Who thinks this way? Do prison reformers back off because at least in Attica inmates aren't stacked naked in a pile having their pictures taken? Here's an antidote to gratitude: the new interim Constitution for Iraq mandates 25 percent female representation in Parliament, which thoroughly trumps the United States on the democracy scale.

History tells us that women's equality is often becalmed by the press of outside events, that the movement that began suffrage, for example, slowed in the face of the Great Depression. But I suspect that some of the slowdown is always about our fear of unfolding our hands and pointing a finger. In "Iron Jawed Angels," the recent HBO film about the suffrage movement, you saw young women who fought and kicked all the way to a prison cell. It's dispiriting to think that they were bloodied but unbowed so their granddaughters could halfheartedly vote for someone who assumes their support instead of seeking it. Those suffragists refused to be polite in demanding what they wanted or grateful for getting what they deserved. Works for me.



PHOTOGRAPH BY CHARLES CHAMBERLAIN FOR NEWSWEEK

THE REASONABLE WOMAN STANDARD

What's good for the goose is good for the gander, and just about everyone else as well

By ANNA QUINDLEN

THIS MAY SOUND STRANGE COMING FROM A LIFE-long feminist, but I've had it with Women's History Month. It's hard for me to believe that Betty Friedan wrote "The Feminine Mystique," protesters trashed the Miss America Pageant and countless women hazarded class-action suits so that each March fourth graders could learn fun facts about Eleanor Roosevelt. Sometimes it seems to me the event is just a sad symbol of how little change we were willing to settle for. A month? We ought to get most of the year. 1

Sure, I get the point: I made it through girlhood without ever hearing of Sojourner Truth or Marie Curie, and I am willing to acknowledge progress. Nearly half the medical students in the country are female. So is the secretary of state. Girls play ice hockey in the Olympics. No one blinks at the sight of a woman cop. Fewer parents believe that their sons should check out colleges and their daughters check out catering halls. Rapes are reported, even prosecuted. Everything has changed since I was a girl, when my choice of career was either mother or nun. 2

And some things never change. The advocacy organization Girls Incorporated releases a survey of schoolgirls this week with the following results: 63 percent said "girls are under a lot of pressure to please everyone," 65 percent said "girls are expected to spend a lot of time on housework and taking care of younger brothers and sisters" and more than half said that "girls are expected to speak softly and not cause trouble." And why not? Last week three young men were convicted of manslaughter after slipping the date-rape drug GHB into the drink of a girl who died. One said this was to make the party "lively." Translated: the best woman is an unconscious woman. 3

So much for Sally Ride. 4

→ The truth is that we got stuck on a plateau here, somewhere between change, which is good, and transformation, which is excellent. There has been some transformation, thanks to the women's movement, which is now, like God, everywhere, from Little League to the Supreme Court. Why do patients feel more confident in asking questions of their physicians and seeking alternative care? Why has community policing, in which cops try to know those they serve, become the order of the day in many cities? Why do newspaper and magazine stories more often include human beings along with statistics? Is it coincidence that all this has happened since women began to enter those professions as both active participants and informed consumers in ever greater numbers? 5

I don't think so. 6

But transformation has come slowly, and too often American society has remained like those men's schools that admitted

women, and overnight became—men's schools with women. A new book, "A Law of Her Own," an utterly persuasive argument for replacing the reasonable-person standard (which is really just a reasonable-man standard in mufti) with a reasonable-woman standard for certain crimes, sums up the plateau perfectly: "to be treated the same means to be treated the same as men." The two lawyers who wrote the book, Caroline Forell and Donna Matthews, argue that applying the test of how a reasonable woman would behave and react in adjudicating crimes like rape, domestic violence and sexual harassment is only sensible because men frequently see those offenses quite differently than the women who are their habitual victims. 7



The advantage of this is not only that it is better for women, but that it is better for everyone. "Applying the reasonable woman standard when a woman sexually harasses a man treats his injury more seriously and respectfully than under a reasonable person/man standard," the authors write. Legal standards that suggest men can't help being boorish and predatory may deny women justice, but they also deny

men dignity. That more female professors than their male counterparts are attracted to the profession because of teaching rather than research is better for students—of both genders. That female doctors have taken the lead in supporting the health-care consumer movement is good for patients—of both genders. Yet in many tenure decisions teaching is not sufficiently rewarded. In many hospitals patient contact is not sufficiently encouraged. A reasonable-woman standard may be better for everyone in countless areas of daily life. But it's devalued by custom. 8

In the recent past, the result of combining that custom with feminist change was sometimes women living imitation guys' lives. (And even wearing imitation guys' clothes. Remember those heinous bow ties?) Of course, many of us couldn't manage the masquerade because the most important transformation, the one in which everyone would share domestic duties, never came off, leaving many women with two jobs, one at the office, the other at home. Martha Stewart's grapevine wreaths notwithstanding, housework is mainly scut work, and there is no argument beyond the simple demands of fairness that can suggest men will be enriched by loading the dishwasher. But when women do most of the child rearing—and they do—men miss the most important emotional experience of their own lives. That's tragic—and bad for everyone. 9

Where the standards of reasonable women are honored, the culture has improved. Where they are not, not. In 1970, when she was trying without success to sell the Equal Rights Amendment, a member of Congress named Edith Green said pithily, "It has been said that if this amendment is passed it will create profound social changes. May I say to you, it is high time some profound social changes were made in our society." Once we were grateful for those Molly Pitcher coloring books. We were grateful to have the access and stature once granted only to men. Forget gratitude. Given the complexity and richness of the lives many women have now cobbled out of past imperatives and present opportunities, real transformation will come when men live more like us. 10

Record: 7

54241150028960420011105

Title: UNCLE SAM AND AUNT SAMANTHA.

Subject(s): DRAFT -- United States; SOLDIERS -- United States; WOMEN soldiers -- United States; ARMED Forces

Source: Newsweek, 11/5/2001, Vol. 138 Issue 19, p76, 1p, 1c

Author(s): Quindlen, Anna

Abstract: Presents the opinion of the author concerning the fairness of the draft system in the United States. Idea that men are required to register, while women are not; Role of women in all fields; Idea that draft legislation is outdated; Issue of feminism.

AN: 5424115

ISSN: 0028-9604

Full Text Word Count: 1060

Database: Academic Search Elite

Section: THE LAST WORD

UNCLE SAM AND AUNT SAMANTHA

It's simple fairness: women as well as men should be required to register for the draft

One out of every five new recruits in the United States military is female. The Marines gave the Combat Action Ribbon for service in the Persian Gulf to 23 women. Two female soldiers were killed in the bombing of the USS Cole.

The Selective Service registers for the draft all male citizens between the ages of 18 and 25.

What's wrong with this picture?

As Americans read and realize that the lives of most women in this country are as different from those of Afghan women as a Cunard cruise is from maximum-security lockdown, there has nonetheless been little attention paid to one persistent gender inequity in U.S. public policy. An astonishing anachronism, really: while women are represented today in virtually all fields, including the armed forces, only men are required to register for the military draft that would be used in the event of a national-security crisis.

Since the nation is as close to such a crisis as it has been in more than 60 years, it's a good moment to consider how the draft wound up in this particular time warp. It's not the time warp of the Taliban, certainly, stuck in the worst part of the 13th century, forbidding women to attend school or hold jobs or even reveal their arms, forcing them into sex and marriage. Our own time warp is several decades old. The last time the draft was considered seriously was 20 years ago, when registration with the Selective Service was restored by Jimmy Carter after the Soviet invasion of, yep, Afghanistan. The president, as well as the Army chief of staff, asked at the time for the registration of women as well as men.

Amid a welter of arguments--women interfere with esprit de corps, women don't have the physical strength, women prisoners could be sexually assaulted, women soldiers would distract male soldiers from their mission--Congress shot down the notion of gender-blind registration. So did the Supreme Court, ruling that since women were forbidden to serve in combat positions and the purpose of the draft was to create a combat-ready force, it made sense not to register them.

But that was then, and this is now. Women have indeed served in combat positions, in the Balkans and the Middle East. More than 40,000 managed to serve in the Persian Gulf without destroying unit cohesion or falling because of upper-body strength. Some are even now taking out targets in Afghanistan from fighter jets, and apparently without any male soldier's falling prey to some predicted excess of chivalry or lust.

Talk about cognitive dissonance. All these military personnel, male and female alike, have come of age at a time when a significant level of parity was taken for granted. Yet they are supposed to accept that only males will be required to defend their country in a time of national emergency. (This is insulting to men. And it is insulting to women.) Caroline Forell, an expert on women's legal rights and a professor at the University of Oregon School of Law, puts it bluntly: "Failing to require this of women makes us lesser citizens."

Neither the left nor the right has been particularly inclined to consider this issue judiciously. Many feminists came from the antiwar movement and have let their distaste for the military in general and the draft in particular mute their response. In 1980 NOW released a resolution that buried support for the registration of women beneath opposition to the draft, despite the fact that the draft had been redesigned to eliminate the vexing inequities of Vietnam, when the sons of the working class served and the sons of the Ivy League did not. Conservatives, meanwhile, used an equal-opportunity draft as the linchpin of opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment, along with the terrifying specter of unisex bathrooms. (I have seen the urinal, and it is benign.) The legislative director of the right-wing group Concerned Women for America once defended the existing regulations by saying that most women "don't want to be included in the draft." All those young men who went to Canada during Vietnam and those who today register with fear and trembling in the face of the Trade Center devastation might be amazed to discover that lack of desire is an affirmative defense.

Parents face a series of unique new challenges in this more egalitarian world, not the least of which would be sending a daughter off to war. But parents all over this country are doing that right now, with daughters who enlisted; some have even expressed surprise that young women, in this day and age, are not required to register alongside their brothers and friends. While all involved in this debate over the years have invoked the assumed opposition of the people, even 10 years ago more than half of all Americans polled believed women should be made eligible for the draft. Besides, this is not about comfort but about fairness. My son has to register with the Selective Service this year, and if his sister does not when she turns 18, it makes a mockery not only of the standards of this household but of the standards of this nation.

It is possible in Afghanistan for women to be treated like little more than fecund pack animals precisely because gender fear and ignorance and hatred have been codified and permitted to hold sway. In this country, largely because of the concerted efforts of those allied with the women's movement over a century of struggle, much of that bigotry has been beaten back, even buried. Yet in improbable places the creaky old ways surface, the ways suggesting that we women were made of finer stuff. The finer stuff was usually porcelain, decorative and on the

shelf, suitable for meals and show. Happily, the finer stuff has been transmuted into the right stuff. But with rights come responsibilities, as teachers like to tell their students. This is a responsibility that should fall equally upon all, male and female alike. If the empirical evidence is considered rationally, if the decision is divested of outmoded stereotypes, that's the only possible conclusion to be reached.

PHOTO (COLOR): Anna Quindlen

By Anna Quindlen

Copyright of Newsweek is the property of Newsweek and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.
Source: Newsweek, 11/5/2001, Vol. 138 Issue 19, p76, 1p, 1c.
Item Number: 5424115

This email was generated by a user of EBSCOhost who gained access via the ANDREWS UNIV account. Neither EBSCO nor ANDREWS UNIV are responsible for the content of this e-mail.

My Turn

Red State, Blue State: It's All in the Family

Dad watches Fox News, I'm a Michael Moore fan.
We drive each other crazy, but we keep talking.

BY CINDY SCHWEICH HANDLER

NO PRESIDENT SINCE ABRAHAM Lincoln has had to put up with so much personal abuse as has George Bush.

"The only thing Bush has in common with Lincoln is his party."

"You and others who believe as you do are so far out, there is no logic of any type that can prevail."

"I can only conclude that you live behind a HUGE WALL OF DENIAL. WHY DO YOU DEFEND GEORGE BUSH? WHAT HAS HE DONE RIGHT?"

"Gotta go. I'm taking your mother out for dinner tonight."

When I find myself typing angry sentences all in caps, I know it's time to take a break from e-mailing and wait until my blood pressure returns from the stratosphere. But I've learned that it takes a lot more than strident punctuation to make my father back down. Since the Clinton administration, we've been sending spirited messages; he from his home in Missouri (a Red State) and I from mine in New Jersey (Blue). Our correspondence has become more heated since 9/11, when my husband barely escaped from the World Trade Center, and more urgent as the presidential election nears. Iraq, tax cuts, global warming ... we have nothing in common but the vehemence of our opinions, and the need to impose them on each other.

As pollsters keep telling us, Americans are more polarized than ever. My father gets his information from the Fox News Network, I quote liberally from (what else?) Air America Radio. He cc's me on his correspondence to producers of a news program, chastising them for displaying photos from Abu Ghraib because he fears it puts our troops at risk; I find the show's Web site and fire off a message of praise for keeping the public informed. Our efforts

cancel each other out, but we still feel that we've accomplished something.

We tell ourselves that our goal is to inform, but it's all too easy for the debate to stray into emotionally dangerous territory. A few months ago, after watching Attorney



SMALL VICTORY: When I see "I agree with you that ..." on my screen, I know how a diplomat feels when she signs a treaty

General John Ashcroft warn TV viewers that New York was once again a likely terrorist target, I was too shaken to sleep. I staggered into my pitch-black study, went online and found the latest installment of an argument I'd been having with my father about whether the media were biased. It seemed like such a luxury to philosophize at a time of possible imminent doom that I responded with a sleep-deprived rant. He backed off with a short and sweet "I really do love you, and if you get this upset, I promise not to do it again."

I've learned to be more sensitive to his sore points, too. On the eve of the Iraq con-

flict, I suggested that my father think twice before "blithely" supporting the decision to send America's young men and women into harm's way. Suddenly, our dialogue ground to a halt. After weeks of silence online I engaged my mother as a go-between, and found that I'd gravely offended him. He might be for the war, he had told her, but the idea of young people risking death wasn't one that made him happy. After that, I tried hard not to characterize his positions—and to never forget his underlying kindness.

My husband wonders why we keep at it, when there's the downside of driving each other crazy. I answer that as long as we're talking, there's hope. Not that we can get the other person to switch teams—we both gave up on that long ago—but that we can understand how we each

arrive at our conclusions, which can lead to small concessions and the possibility of meeting halfway.

When I see "I agree with you that ..." on my screen, I know how a diplomat must feel when she signs a treaty, and it feels better than just getting something off my chest.

Unfortunately, it seems that discourse these days is often limited to just that. It's especially easy to develop an "us" versus "them" mentality when, as demographers point out, more and more members of our mobile society choose to live in like-minded communities. That's true in my town, with its nearly 4:1 ratio of Democrats to Republicans. My friends are accustomed to being vehemently agreed with every time they discuss access to abortion or better gun-control legislation, and it shocks them to hear that I'm closely related to a Bush booster. What follows is usually wonder at how anyone could possibly support tax cuts for the rich and the illegal

war in Iraq. I tell them that the only way to find out is to ask.

Granted, it's easier debating your father than a stranger. We're bound to each other not only by our interest in polemics, but by love. We know that we share the same concern about leaving the world a better place for my children, his grandchildren. But as the political divide in this country widens, it might help to remind ourselves that Americans on both sides want the same thing. They're just in bitter disagreement about how to make it happen.

HANDLER is a writer living in Montclair, N.J.

MY TURN

GROWING UP A FOSTER KID

I've survived the system and begun my college education. Some of us aren't so lucky.

BY KEVIN SIEG

I AM AN ORPHAN, BUT THAT'S NOT WHAT DEFINES ME. WHEN I walk around the University of Akron campus, I look just like every other freshman—scared and confused, but filled with excitement and optimism. I do, however, face one challenge that separates me from the rest of the bunch. On July 1 the foster-care system in Cleveland cut me loose from state custody. I officially “aged out” of the system. Because regulations vary from state to state and county to county, aging out can mean turning 18 or graduating from high school. Though I ask myself the same questions as my classmates—How am I going to pay for school? Where will I go for the holidays and in the summer?—I am completely alone in making my decisions.

Still, I consider myself lucky. Of the more than 20,000 kids who aged out of foster care across America last summer, only 35 percent graduated from high school. And only 11 percent will go on to college or vocational school.

My life as a foster child began on a sunny May day in 1987. One minute I was helping my favorite teacher, and the next minute the principal was leading me by the hand to her office where two police officers and several social workers waited. I was in the third grade. I will never know who called social services.

Life with my mother had never been easy, and I have never met my father. Although I only recently learned that my mother is a paranoid schizophrenic, I recall that her behavior was frequently bizarre. She thought someone was constantly hitting her, and she suspected me. My childhood memories are of hiding from her as she angrily chased me from room to room.

That day also marks the beginning of my life as an orphan. While most people think of orphans as children whose parents have died, the Orphan Foundation of America defines “orphan” as “any child permanently separated from his parents through death, abandonment, abuse or neglect.”

The drive to my first foster home, in a suburb of Cleveland, seemed to take an eternity. In fact, it was 20 minutes. I had never been out of my urban neighborhood and nothing seemed familiar, not the big suburban houses with lawns or my new foster parents. I called them “Grandma” and “Grandpa” because they were too old to be “Mom” and “Dad.” Being taken in by foster parents does not feel like joining a family, at least not initially. I was only 8 years old and didn't know what to think or how to feel in the home of these strangers.

But kids adapt well, especially when their very existence depends on it. Like most of us in the foster system, I tried to please everyone. Despite the stereotype that we are “troublemakers,” most of the foster children I know work really hard at getting along with everybody. I was what you would call a “good kid.” I

always loved school. My teachers were my mentors and my classmates were my family; many of them shared their holidays and family outings with me. Thanks to them I had birthday parties, went on picnics and attended concerts and baseball games.

Yet the day came when I had to move again. My foster parents wrongly accused me of stealing, and told me to pack my suitcase. While I sat on the curb waiting for my social worker to arrive, I thought about all the people I wouldn't be seeing again. For the second time in my life, there was no time to say goodbye.

And, as always, my mother was nowhere to be found. She missed most of the visits with me that were arranged by the Department of Children and Family Services while I was a child. And she certainly didn't come running when I was abruptly moved at the age of 17.

My senior year in high school was spent in Canton, Ohio, with a new foster family. The checks my foster parents received monthly for my care stopped coming when I graduated, and I officially “aged out” of the system. Since there was another foster child coming to their home, I had to leave immediately, and overnight I became responsible for a place to live, health insurance and my college education.



Luckily, I have found loving, caring people who have taken an interest in me over the years. I have aunts and uncles who were unable to take me in but still gave emotional support through regular phone conversations and occasional visits to their homes. Several of my teachers helped me with everything from school issues to personal problems by listening when I needed someone to care.

And I am now part of the Orphan Foundation of America (OFA), a small, volunteer-run organization in Vienna, Va., that awards college scholarships to foster kids. Through OFA I have found a new family, made up of other orphans, volunteers and my scholarship sponsors. I am one of 60 orphans in an OFA program that brings foster teens to Washington to speak to national leaders about foster-care issues.

When people think about foster kids, they picture babies or small children. Little kids without parents are easy to care about. But those little ones grow up quickly and are suddenly dropped by a system they have come to rely on. Many of us leave the system without the support systems and skills to guide us into productive adulthoods. As many as 25 percent of us will end up homeless at some point in our adult lives.

The solution to this crisis is for more citizens, community and civic groups, churches, synagogues and the corporate community to be actively involved in our transition to adulthood. Every foster kid I know has the same wish list: affordable housing in safe neighborhoods, health insurance and more support and encouragement for our career and educational goals.

A college friend's mother asked recently if my mother and I have a good relationship today. The truth is I haven't spoken to her in six years. I have made peace with that part of my life, and I feel sorry that she's had to struggle with mental illness for so many years. Right now though, for my own well-being, I have to move on. My survival depends on it.

SIEG majors in music education at the University of Akron.

THE MASK OF MASCULINITY

Is manliness natural or a 'social construct' that causes wars and sport utility vehicles?

By GEORGE F. WILL

PROF. HARVEY MANSFIELD IS HARVARD'S CONSERVATIVE. Well, all right, he is one of Harvard's handful of conservatives, a.k.a. The Saving Remnant. A few years ago he received a call when a distinguished colleague retired.

The caller, a young woman journalist, wanted a comment on the retirement. Mansfield obliged, saying he particularly admired the colleague's "manliness." An awkward silence ensued from the other end of the line. Then the reporter asked Mansfield, "Could you think of another word?"

What might be wrong with that word? That is a (literally) academic question, now that professors and somber quarterlies are creating a new discipline: masculinity studies. That subject is being, as it were, married to "women's studies" to round out "gender studies," as at Hobart and William Smith Colleges, where there now is a Center for the Study of Women and Men.

Well. In olden days, before these things were understood with today's clarity, people thought that when they studied subjects such as philosophy, history, politics, sociology, anthropology, art, music and literature they were engaged in the study of women and men. But back to Mansfield's journalistic interlocutor. The problem she had with the word "manliness" probably was twofold.

First, the word is stained with the supposition that manliness is a virtue. Advanced thinkers execrate the idea of a virtue that is not a gender-neutral, equal-opportunity virtue. Both men and women can be brave, frank, aggressive, competitive, loyal, stoical. Is manliness anything more than a tossed salad of those attributes? If so, can a woman be manly? (Was François Mitterrand suggesting androgyny when he said Margaret Thatcher has the eyes of Caligula and the lips of Marilyn Monroe?)

Second, leave aside the question of whether "manliness" should be celebrated as a virtue rather than condemned as a social virus that causes wars, sport utility vehicles and other testosterone spills. But perhaps manliness is (because everything is) a "social construct." Here is the heart of "gender studies": If all human attributes are consequences of social arrangements, then clever rearrangement of society can produce whatever results the rearrangers want. If so, neither biology nor history nor nature is destiny. All is nurture and ephemeral, nothing is instinctive, innate, permanent. Nothing is destined. Everything is a matter of choice. Free at last, free at last...

One tool for striking the chains from woman's wrists and ankles is a noun that has become a verb: parent. It makes fathers and mothers interchangeable, their differences fungible, their duties negotiable.

And why not, now that The New York Times reports this bulletin: "Masculinity is not monolithic"? Indeed. Mark McGwire

cries. Male peacockery flourished before and after Henry VIII donned silk stockings to show off his legs. The Times cites a professor in Indiana who has written a book on masculinity as portrayed in the movies of Jimmy Stewart, Jack Nicholson and Clint Eastwood. The professor asks, "What if masculinity is a construction, something we unconsciously work very hard on making ourselves into that we've all coned ourselves into believing is natural?" The professor seems to think he is entertaining a daring idea, but nowadays nothing seems more natural than disbelief in the natural.

Manliness is usually thought to involve, above all, courage, especially in battle. In American literature, manliness is famously acquired by the young man in "The Red Badge of Courage" who acquires that red badge—a wound. Manliness, says Mansfield thoughtfully, celebrates action over thought, so "one could even say that thinking is in itself a challenge to the superiority of manliness."

If womanliness (which is not a synonym for femininity) is the opposite of manliness, womanliness is more reflective, even philosophical, and less animal, more human, hence higher. Males are not flattered by what



Mansfield calls "the asymmetry of the sexes." Aristotle said men find it easier to be courageous and women find it easier to be moderate. Mansfield suggests that this is because women are more thoughtful. Would a really '90s Man, caring and sensitive, want the largely animal attribute of manliness, or regard it as virtuous? We speak of speed being a virtue in a racehorse, but horses cannot be virtuous.

But wait. Perhaps the '90s Man himself is inherently insidious. Perhaps he is sneaking patriarchy—the subordination of women—back into society, from which it was so recently expelled. Gallantry, which everyone knows is condescension, may now come quietly, on little cat feet, disguised as sensitivity.

Perhaps what everyone knows is false. Maybe the gallantry of opening a door for a woman expresses disdain by asserting that the man is stronger. Then again, physical strength is a merely animal attribute. And opening a door may express sincere rather than guileful deference. Mansfield: "The woman does go first."

Then again, male sensitivity was not born yesterday. Some of the stuffed animals that children cuddle are called Teddy Bears because on one famous occasion the man who was the rough-riding personification of self-conscious manliness was too sensitive to shoot a wee bear. Yes, Teddy Roosevelt. That (18) '90s Man thought war was splendidly bracing for a nation, and that if a war was not handy, war's moral equivalent, football, would have to suffice.

Mansfield says that feminists fault masculinity primarily for its antidemocratic exclusivity. They want society reconstructed so they can act as masculine as men have to, and they want men reconstructed so they will act a little less masculine, more sensitive. Feminists' real complaint, says Mansfield, is with femininity, the "mystique" (Betty Friedan) of mildness that men supposedly have foisted on women to keep them in their place, which is down, as the "second sex" (Simone de Beauvoir).

"Why can't a woman be more like a man?" ask some feminists. It is a fair, and complex, question famously asked in "My Fair Lady" by Professor Henry Higgins, no feminist.

ARE METROSEXUALS FAKE FAGS?

STRAIGHT MEN HAVE
BEEN ENVIOUS
OF GAYS FOR YEARS.
UNTIL RECENTLY, IT
WAS A COMPLIMENT.
NOW THIS WHOLE
"METROSEXUAL"
THING IS MAKING ONE
GAY MAN WISH HE
WASN'T FABULOUS IN
THE FIRST PLACE.

THE FIRST TIME I MET MY MAGAZINE-EDITOR FRIEND "D," I assumed he was a cool, modern gay guy. He wasn't swishy or anything. But he was a little emotional and pretty hip and... you know, gay. His fashion sense was deceptively casual, suggesting past consultations with stylists. He was cool in a way that straight guys simply are not. And he talked about seeing some new collection in Paris and how hot the guys on the runway were this season. That's pretty gay.

So imagine my surprise to learn that D was straight. And no, not in-the-closet-straight. Straight-straight. It was only when I discovered that he was 31 and not 39 like I'd assumed (apparently the magazine business ages you even faster than advertising does) that it all made sense.

The new generation of hetero men has effectively erased the heretofore obvious boundaries between gay and straight. Gaydar—the innate alert system that activates every time a gay guy (me) steps within ten paces of another gay guy—has been jammed. It is no longer possible to tell a homo at a glance. Welcome to the days of the dreaded "metrosexual." And unfortunately, it looks like these fake fags are here to stay: I have it on good authority that Merriam-Webster is reviewing the word *metrosexual* for inclusion in a forthcoming edition of its dictionary.

Need I remind you, this is the era of men with trimmed chest hair and open-toe sandals who are engaged to women named Elizabeth. These guys are planning their own weddings—even down to the gown. Today it's not uncommon to see a guy drag his girlfriend to a new Renée Zellweger flick just so he can cry, because he needs release. And not that kind of release, either.

At my book signings, I am constantly amazed by all the swanky Prada fags who come up to me and say, "Oh my God, I just loved your book... it was *fabulous*," then reach around and grab some girl. "And this is Caitlin, my wife. And she loves you too. We both do. Nice baseball cap, by the way. *Really* sets off your jaw."

I, for one, think this is the opposite of progress. It was bad enough that gay guys were air-kissing on the streets like Upper East Side socialites. But two lumbering, ordinary buds stopping on the sidewalk to discuss their pedicures seems to me a sign that society is collapsing.

I first noticed the trend as far back as the summer of 1995, when I was working for a then-cool ad agency. All of a sudden, the straight guys started coming to work with product in their hair. Soon after, they were eating salads and going to the gym. By the fall of 1996, every straight guy in the office had at least one gay male friend from the media department whom they'd invariably ask "Do these pants make my ass look big?"

I have a lot of straight male friends, so I took a "Do you think you're really a fag?" poll. Ten percent answered, "No, why? Are these low-riders really gay or something?" And the remaining 90 percent replied, "No, not at all. Except I wouldn't kick Bill Hemmer out of bed, ha ha."

Ironically, it's the clichéd, sports-fanatic straight guy who is the gayest of all. I mean, what could possibly be gayer than having the name of another man—a muscular athlete, no less—stitched onto the very shirt you wear against your flesh, your sweaty nipples poking through the "J" and "N" of good ol' No. 23 after a game of pickup. (That's pickup basketball for you full-on fags.) Come to think of it, maybe yelling *Swish!* after every jump shot runs a close second. Not to mention all the "man-to-man" defense going on.

So maybe straight guys have been the ones in the closet all along. Suddenly it's nonthreatening for them to find emotional closeness with another man. Now it's okay for them to be stylish and care about their pores. Two fellas can embrace on the street and talk about foreskin restoration and share their pain. Hell, the most popular show on TV over the summer starred five faggots gaying-up some rough-and-tumble straight. What's next? Classes on mastering your gag reflex and breathing through your nose billed as hetero-blow-job seminars?

It's enough to make me wish I were a big hairy dyke. ■